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Terrorism Review

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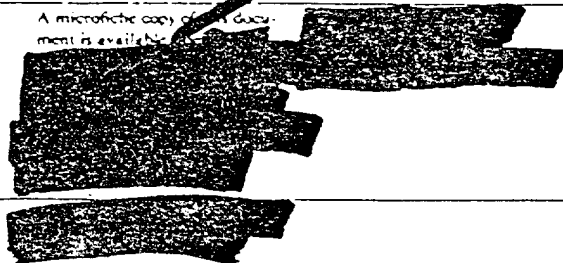
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13 July 1989

Bolivia: Growing Threat From Zarate Willka

The assassination of two American missionaries by members of the radical leftist group Armed Liberation Forces Zarate Willka may presage further attacks on US officials and Bolivian political leaders viewed as supporting US policy. Named for an obscure Bolivian Indian leader, Pablo Zarate Willka, who led a campesino uprising in 1899, the group has claimed responsibility for a number of bombings and other incidents in the past two years under the names Comandante Zarco and Comando Simon Bolivar as well as Zarate Willka. Some of the claims have been patently false; except for this most recent incident, the attacks have caused little damage. The missionaries were shot to death outside their home in La Paz on 24 May. Within a half hour of the killings, claim notes appeared at two La Paz newspapers, *La Prensa* and *Ultima Hora*. Because Zarate Willka's claim reached the newspapers so soon after the attack, we believe that—despite questionable claims by the group for previous attacks—it was responsible for these killings. The missionaries were easily identifiable targets who were more vulnerable than official US installations.

The missionaries, who were Mormons, were probably targeted because of local perceptions that their religious group is an extension of US imperialism. The attackers claimed that the killings were a warning to "Yankee invaders" and said the group's war with the United States was "to the death." The Mormon community in Bolivia, which is a very large and visible American presence, has come under occasional public criticism and attack. According to press reports, a Bolivian bishop said last year that "religious sects constitute the spearpoint of Yankee imperialism" and that these missionaries were sent by the US Government to divide the Bolivian family. Along the same lines, two Bolivian newspaper articles in May 1988 quoted a US newspaper article that claimed that "the CIA prefers to recruit Mormon missionaries because of their international experience, ability to speak foreign languages, strict morality, and conservative opinions." Two months later a Mormon chapel

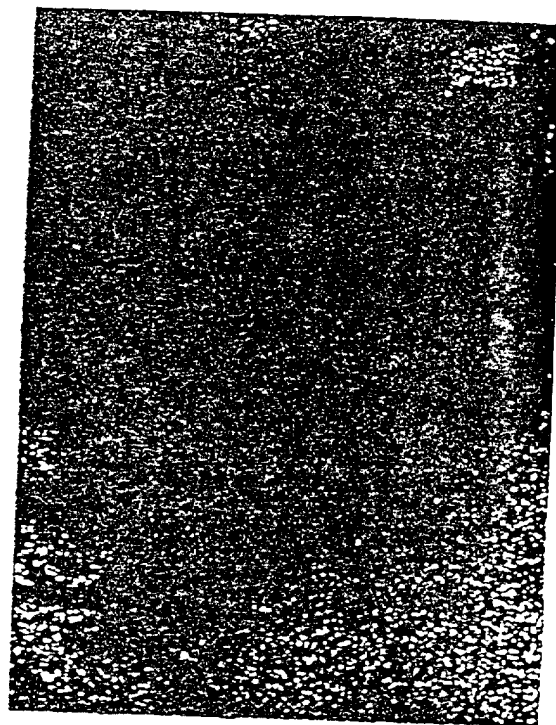


Figure 1. La Paz: assassination scene. (U)

in La Paz was bombed and spray-painted with the slogans "Yankos out of Bolivia" and "CIA agents." Since the murder of the two Mormons, concern for the safety of US missionaries has prompted the withdrawal of many of them from outlying areas.

Background

A number of sources indicate that Zarate Willka is a small, urban-based leftist group, primarily composed of university students and former National Liberation Army (ELN) members centered at the Universidad Mayor de San Andres.

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Chronology of Zarate Willka Claims

29 October 1987. Bomb explodes in the doorway of the Bolivian Ministry of Mines. In a call to a La Paz radio station, Zarate Willka claimed this attack as well as an earlier explosion at a private mining company in protest of "Yankee imperialism" and Bolivian economic policy.

8 August 1988. Bomb explodes along the route of Secretary of State Shultz's motorcade in La Paz. Citing the slogan "Fatherland or Death," Zarate Willka and Comandante Simon Bolivar claimed the bombing in separate letters.

21 October 1988. Large-scale power outage in La Paz is claimed by Zarate Willka in fliers passed out during the extended blackout, and in a local newspaper. Gunfire heard just before the outage lent credence to the group's claim of sabotage.

6 December 1988. Peruvian Naval attache assassinated on a La Paz street. Although Zarate Willka claimed the attack two days later, other indications point to Sendero Luminoso as being responsible.

7 December 1988. Bomb explodes in the Chamber of Deputies. A communique signed by Zarate Willka claimed the incident and condemned the Bolivian Government, calling for wage increases, jobs, and other popular welfare policies.

5 May 1989. Small explosion occurs near Oruro Department electoral court two days before the presidential election. Zarate Willka claimed the attack in graffiti nearby.

24 May 1989. Two Mormon missionaries are assassinated. Claims were received by two La Paz newspapers within 30 minutes of the shootings.

30 May 1989. Death threats signed by Zarate Willka received by El Alto mayor and municipal council chairman. Letters demanded the expulsion of peddlers from a security zone.

by the successful attack against the two missionaries, is contemplating actions against more secure targets, including the US Ambassador, according to an official security service. Bolivian politicians reportedly are also potential targets, especially members of the ruling Nationalist Revolutionary Movement, which Zarate Willka considers the party most manipulated by the United States. Zarate Willka may find additional impetus to strike if the Paz Estenssoro government continues its US-supported antinarcotics efforts or if the group perceives that the US presence is increasing. The group reportedly hopes to intimidate US officials and force the United States to withdraw from Bolivia. As the police conduct more arrests and discover further information on the group, leaders may try to carry out attacks before the group is completely disrupted. Moreover, as leftists become more isolated from the political mainstream, Zarate Willka and other nascent Bolivian terrorist groups will probably try to exploit any public backlash to antinarcotics measures—especially among students and peasants—to further their recruitment efforts and terrorist activities.

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